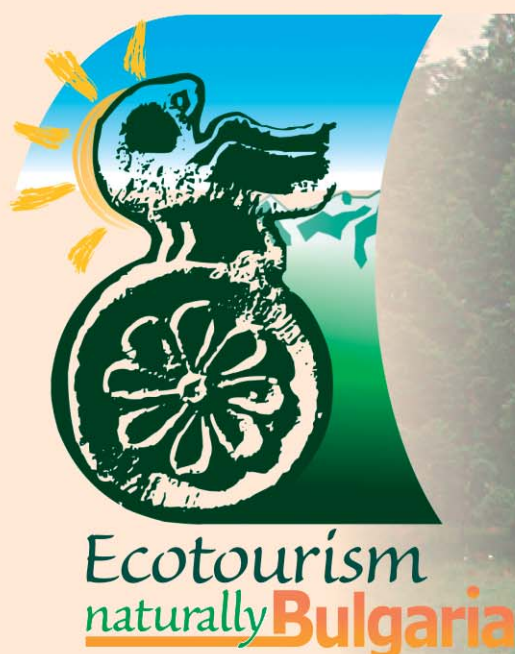


**Sow a seed ... and Think about Next Year  
Plant a Tree ... and Dream about the Next Decade  
Educate People ... and Plan for the Next Century**

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## **REPORT ON THE REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS**

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**FEBRUARY, 2004  
SOFIA, BULGARIA**

**Saw a seed ... and Think about Next Year**

**Plant a Tree ... and Dream about the Next Decade**

**Educate People ... and Plan for Next Century**

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*The opinions presented within are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Agency for International Development or of the government of Bulgaria.*

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## FOREWORD

*This paper is intended to describe the action-plan creation process of twelve potential ecotourism destinations in Bulgaria.*

*It describes the steps in the process and the results.  
It also includes viewpoints of those participating in the planning creation process.*

*This is the first ecotourism planning process carried out in Bulgaria on such a scale. The end result is the production of twelve ecotourism action plans for twelve potential ecotourism destinations. These plans served as the basis for a five-year national action plan.*

*We hope that our experience can be of use to others.*

*This process and its results were made possible solely by the optimism, responsible attitude towards nature and the industrious spirit of the hundreds of enthusiastic people throughout the country who believe that Ecotourism is naturally for Bulgaria and, most importantly, who are willing to work for their prosperity.*

*This paper is dedicated to all of them.*



**Planning process - Kalofer**

*Archive Ecotourism Association Central Balkan – Kalofer*



**Bulgarian traditional costumes**

*Archive Regional Administration – Sliven*



## **Part 1: Introduction**

### **The background: the need of ecotourism action plans**

#### **1.1. Bulgaria – a country with high potential for ecotourism development**

Bulgaria is a country with exceptional diversity of resources that present ecotourism development opportunities. Its relatively small territory combines uniquely preserved nature with remarkable cultural and historical heritage, mild continental weather, interesting landscapes and hospitable people are historically tolerant to differences and respecting traditions.

Bulgaria's biodiversity is very significant for Europe. Unique nature areas are protected and conserved in a system of protected areas covering almost 5% of the country's territory. Three national parks have been created: Rila, Pirin and Central Balkan. In addition to the national parks, 10 nature parks, 90 reserves, 175 protected localities and 457 nature sites exist. The Central Balkan National Park gained certification by the European network Pan Park in 2003, another proof of the quality of Bulgaria's preserved nature.

The country's cultural and historical heritage has been created and passed from generation to generation thorough the 14 centuries of existence of the Bulgarian state. Various peoples such as Thracians, Slavs and Proto Bulgarians have traversed the geographic crossroads on which Bulgaria lies and each have left parts of their own culture. Traces of the first inhabitants of Europe, who lived in the ancient Neolithic dwellings, can be found here. The mystic charm of religious cult worship sites, combined with medieval castles and the warm architecture of houses from the Renaissance, create an intriguing tourist destination. Today, Bulgarians keep the customs and traditions of the previous generations.

In today's world of high technology and fast paced lifestyle, Bulgaria's magnificent forests, pure water, and rural areas are tucked far away in a place where one can experience a return to traditional human values and a peaceful lifestyle. Those who like high-speed and extreme experiences can make unforgettable memories in the mountains of Bulgaria.



***Rila**  
Jared Hardner*

#### **1.2. Pilot Ecotourism Development Initiatives**

Bulgaria's resources allow the creation of products catering to the ecotourist experience. As part of the tourism sector, ecotourism is oriented towards users who are interested in nature, concerned about nature quality and conservation, and who realize by being ecotourists they make a contribution to the well-being of the local people.

Ecotourism is more than just a form of tourism; it's an attitude toward the world. This attitude is increasingly perceived as local identity of those who reside near around protected areas.

The 2001 and 2002 pilot initiatives for ecotourism development around the Rila and Central Balkan national parks illustrate that small communities are increasingly interested in ecotourism. These initiatives began with the implementation of the first National Park management plans.

The purpose of these pilot projects was to establish a model for partnership between the administrations of protected areas and the local communities. The partnership would allow for sustainable use of the natural resources. The

model rests on the understanding that ecotourism allows the combining of interests of the local population, opportunities for economic development of the area and nature conservation through environmentally friendly activities. The partnership development work lead to the 2002 creation of ecotourism societies in Samokov municipality and the town of Kalofer. The societies unite local entrepreneurs, representatives of local authorities and representatives of the national parks. They are the focus for ecotourism activities in their respective regions.

In the last ten years, a series of ecotourism initiatives were implemented in other parts of the country: the Rhodopes, Pirin, the Black sea coast and Vrachanski Balkan mountain, to name a few. Some of these initiatives were based on the joint efforts of the state and private sectors for biodiversity conservation, entrepreneur development and strengthening of local authorities. Many were supported by bilateral and international donors. Other initiatives include the efforts of protected area administrations to involve local communities in ecotourism development activities in and around protected areas. Approximately 70 project ideas were generated in just two days during the preparation of the First National Ecotourism Forum.

All of these factors acted as a catalyst to begin work on the creation of a common vision for ecotourism development in Bulgaria.

### 1.3. Interest in ecotourism by the local communities and the state

The pilot initiatives in the country helped to clarify the model for successful ecotourism development and *stimulated widespread public interest* toward the ecotourism philosophy and practices. They stimulated processes of *local community consolidation* around the opportunities for ecotourism related family business. This created *new jobs* and started the development of tourism services in the towns and villages around the protected areas. The local authorities were given the opportunity to formulate a *new municipality development vision*.

The partnerships for ecotourism development created in various parts of Bulgaria, the efforts of protected area administrations, the efforts the tourist societies and organizations (some of which specialize in ecotourism), and the results of the implementation of the entrepreneurship method around the Rila and Central Balkan national parks all boosted the interest of a wider range of organizations, institutions and individual entrepreneurs. Many new members joined the newly established ecotourism societies in less than half a year. The neighboring municipalities showed interest taking steps to create ecotourism partnerships and put the region on the ecotourism product market.

#### The Kalofer Case Study

##### Changes during the pilot project period – 2001-2002

- ☐ The number of registered accommodation facilities increased from 3 to 14
  - ☐ The number of available rooms increased from 10 to 50
  - ☐ The number of beds in them increased from 20 to 100
  - ☐ A new restaurant was opened
  - ☐ Owners used predominantly their own capital to expand their businesses.
- Approximately 70,000 Leva were invested in tourist sites in Kalofer between 2001 and 2002
- ☐ A local entrepreneur opened a new Internet center
  - ☐ Three new investments exist; a horse-riding farm, a new apiary and a new hotel
  - ☐ New property was purchased for the horse farm
  - ☐ A new tourist information center was opened in late 2002 creating two new jobs, and received 4000 visitors in 2003

Motivated by efforts throughout Bulgaria, three Bulgarian ministries including the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Ministry of the Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests have expressed their appreciation of the importance of ecotourism for the overall development of Bulgaria's tourism industry. A National Ecotourism Working Group was established in February 2002 to analyze conditions and to recommend changes to the national tourism policy for the support of ecotourism development. The national group included representatives of the three ministries, the Local Self-Government Reform Foundation, members of national, regional and local tourist societies, information centers and nature conservation non-governmental organizations.

The creation of this working group was a clear statement of the intentions of the state to support ecotourism development. The first National Ecotourism Forum, held in October 2002, showed the commitment of the Bulgarian government to make ecotourism a national priority. During the concluding session of the forum, a *Cooperation Protocol* was signed by the Minister of Environment and Water, the Minister of Economy and the Minister of Agriculture and Forests. This protocol expresses the readiness of the three ministries to create a sustainable institutional mechanism for the completion and subsequent implementation of the National Ecotourism Strategy.

#### **1.4. National Ecotourism Strategy**

The Ministry of Economy proposed that the Working Group should contribute to the preparation of the National Ecotourism Development Strategy as part of the National Tourism Development Strategy. The relationship between nature conservation, cultural heritage and ecotourism had to be systematized and the manner of interaction and development trends had to be clarified. USAID donated financial support for this initiative through the BCEG Project.

The National Ecotourism Strategy was drafted in less than a year. It was created with the involvement of the Working Group, experts in biodiversity and cultural heritage, planning professionals and experts in other areas of the Strategy that needed further clarification. The first draft of the strategy, resulting from four workshops, was presented to the "National Forum on Eco-Tourism, Mountains and Protected Areas – Partners for Well-Being" in October 2002. Statements and discussions during the forum were a valuable contribution for the clarification of main concepts within the Strategy. An important role was played both by Bulgarian participants, 182 in total, and by 45 foreign guests who included representatives of the UN Environment Program, the International Ecotourism Association, the World Tourism Organization, the World Travel and Tourism Council, the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the Council of Europe, the Pan Parks association and others. The second draft of the Strategy was presented at the National Working Meeting in February 2003 with the participation of more than 150 representatives of all interested institutions. The third draft, reflecting the results of the conference, was disseminated in June 2003 and served as the framework for the creation of the National Action Plan.

The national strategy describes available resources, ecotourism development legislation, the relevant institutions, stakeholders, financing and current practices. Analysis of this information provided the basis to define the objectives and basic mechanisms of ecotourism development for a period of ten years.

## Part 2: The ecotourism plan development model

### 2.1. National ecotourism action plan

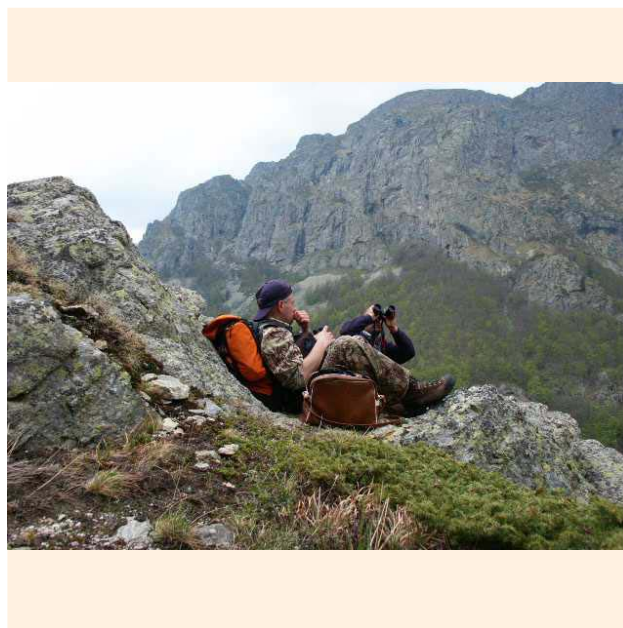
The achievement of the strategy objectives required the creation of an action plan which mapped out specific activities with schedules, required resources and implementing parties. *The ecotourism development action plan covers a five-year period.* It reflects the results from ecotourism development planning at the local level in Bulgaria and which form the national level working groups where experts from six areas participate:

- ☐ Application of information technology for ecotourism development
- ☐ Development of entrepreneurship in ecotourism
- ☐ Development and marketing of products
- ☐ Ecotourism financing and financial mechanisms
- ☐ The role of the local authorities in ecotourism development
- ☐ Institutional development

The results of this planning formed the thematic working groups which improved the National Strategy and which generated ideas for specific actions necessary for the achievement of the Strategy objectives. Work at the national level was supported both by Bulgarian and international consultants: scientists from the Geology and Geography Department of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, experts from the Local Self-Government Reform Foundation, specialists in entrepreneurship and international ecotourism consultants.

### 2.2. Regional ecotourism action plans – planning with wide involvement of local communities

Improvement of the strategy at the national level was carried out in parallel with local support of a widespread action planning process for twelve potential ecotourism destinations in Bulgaria. This process reflected the agreement for support of a widespread public dialog on ecotourism development in the country. This agreement is delineated in the Protocol for Cooperation of the participat-



**Birdwatchers**  
*Central Balkan National Park Archives*

ing three ministries.

The planning process was carried out in twelve potential ecotourism destinations.

Planning in every region was based on plan creation model with the involvement of all stakeholders. This approach is based on the understanding that:

- ☐ Local communities and stakeholders need to be informed of the essence and objectives of the process in which they can be involved
- ☐ Conditions and opportunities should be created for direct participation in the creation of ecotourism related proposals and decisions
- ☐ Organizations, institutions and citizens are equal participants in an open public discussion process and are able to propose ecotourism development priorities and activities for their regions on the basis of committed and responsible involvement
- ☐ Widespread participation of stakeholders at the planning stage is a pre-requisite for their inclusion in the process of implementation of the Plan activities.

The benefits of stakeholder involvement in the planning process are as follows:

- ☐ Ecotourism problems can be evaluated in dif-



fering ways, which makes decision making on all issues an integral process with many problem solving possibilities

- ❑ Guarantees for sustained resolving of issues of ecotourism development in the region increase due to the creation process correlation and interaction among the stakeholders involved
- ❑ The stakeholders receive direct confirmation and self-assurance of the fact that ecotourism issues are also of interest to other people, organizations and institutions
- ❑ Possibilities for beneficial contacts and combining of resources are created
- ❑ The number of those committed to ecotourism development increases.

Ecotourism is a vital resource that can be developed efficiently only by considering mutual relations between individual service suppliers, the level of interaction between individual local community representatives and the general condition of the environment, both locally and nationwide. The integral nature of ecotourism requires implementation of a planning model that allows for meeting and discussion of all those interested in the formulation of mutual solutions for the future of ecotourism. The regional action plan creation process provided this possibility and allowed participants to make decisions concerning ecotourism development in their respective regions on the basis of public consensus.

*"This is the first planning process of such magnitude in the region. I am sure that the approach of stakeholder and community involvement is extremely fruitful because it allows the participants to feel partial to the ideas of the Plan. People participated with great desire and enthusiasm and had a chance to present their views for ecotourism development in the region. This planning approach presents the values of ecotourism among local people."*

*Hristo Abadzhiev*

*Regional Administration for Blagoevgrad, Regional Development Expert*

*"The process of mutual ecotourism planning is timely. People and institutions are ready to participate in such a mutual process. The process was a motivator for all participants. In fact, we are all convinced that we have adherent, and at the same time everyone saw their place in the general picture."*

*Initially we thought that the time was too short to achieve such significant results. Now that we have a complete regional plan we found that this intensive process allowed all participants to recognize their own contributions and to feel the regional plans as their own creation"*

*Simana Markovska*

*Executive Director of the Pirin Tourist Forum*

### 2.3. Process Management

The creation of ecotourism action plans for the twelve ecotourism destinations was coordinated by the four main participants in the process, each of whom had a specific role:

- ❑ BCEG Project – coordinator of the entire planning program at national and local levels which provided methodological support for drafting the plans in all 12 regions
- ❑ Project Organizers – regional coordinators of the campaign for the planning and implementation of the regional action planning process. These were regional and local tourist associa-

tions and societies best acquainted with stakeholders or with regional administrations.

- ❑ Consultants – supported and advised the plan creation process. They worked with regions during the campaign, advised the coordinating organization on stakeholder involvement and participation approaches and ensured interaction between stakeholders in the region.

Local Self-Government Reform Foundation – experts from the Foundation worked together with the Consultants to involve local authorities in the process and to integrate the ecotourism plan priorities into regional and municipal development plans.

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## 2.4. Basic steps in the Action Plan creation process in the twelve potential ecotourism destinations

There were several steps in the ecotourism action plan creation approach:

### ❑ *Review of the National Ecotourism Strategy*

Local communities and the stakeholders in every region learned the objectives and mechanisms for ecotourism development in Bulgaria, and commented on the draft strategy. Education materials were used to present the draft strategy and the main priorities for the future development of ecotourism in Bulgaria.

### ❑ *Review and evaluation of ecotourism resources.*

The coordinating organizations and the consultants worked together to study the state of local ecotourism development resources. Existing catalogues, municipal listings and special studies were used. This gave a relatively complete pic-

ture of the potential of each destination to create ecotourism products. Such products include nature (and other) attractions, accommodation facilities and shelters, services, festivals, cultural and historical landmarks and others. This process involved all stakeholders.

### ❑ *Determining the priorities and necessary actions for the following five years.*

An open discussion began at this stage of the process resulting in an agreement between the stakeholders on ecotourism development priorities for the region. One or more seminars were conducted in all locations involving virtually all stakeholders, interested institutions and the local populace. Action plans were developed delineating specific activities and responsibilities.

### ❑ *Public presentation of regional plans.*

This was the final stage of the process. It provided public awareness of the actions envisioned in the plan and allowed for integration of new viewpoints.

## Part 3: The planning process

### 3.1. Preliminary work on the planning campaign

The intensive action planning process required detailed preliminary planning of all activities and interactions at regional and national levels. For this reason, the public campaign for the creation of the plans was preceded by a planning process with several basic stages. The main stage was the preliminary mutual planning process. This involved all regional organizations and other main participants in the process, including consultants, LGRF experts, the second BCEG Project and donors. This step was intended to guide all key participants through the approaches and steps envisioned in the process, to clarify possibilities of the planning campaign and to envision combined activities. A joint planning workshop was conducted in Sofia in July 2003 (*Appendix 1*). Three representatives from each of the twelve ecotourism destinations participated.

The workshop had the following objectives:

- ☐ To create the team to complete the ecotourism strategy and to develop action plans for the country's ecotourism destinations
- ☐ To guide and prepare regional teams to conduct the process
- ☐ To create a common work plan for the forthcoming process
- ☐ To clarify mechanisms of cooperation and the roles of the parties involved in the process

The second stage was on-site planning of the campaign for each destination with assistance from the consultants. This stage set the basis for all action plan development activities. It took approximately two weeks and required planning by



**Action Plan –**  
*Danube River Wetlands Destination*

the consultants and coordinators. Detailed plans were developed for trips and individual meetings, for stakeholder awareness and involvement, for media work and for the publication of information posters. The main messages and statements presenting the process in the region were prepared. It became clear which stakeholders are interested in ecotourism and meetings. Correspondences with interested groups were prepared.

Partnerships in the regions were strengthened for the purpose of plan development. Working groups were created, with key participants from their respective municipalities, to plan the campaign. This process took place during August and early September 2003.

*"The best part is that ecotourism has become the subject of talking and thinking at all levels. At last we come to real understanding of the idea that nature conservation and tourism can go hand-in-hand. It became clear during the planning process that ecotourism is maintained by everyone from the local community.*

*We were aided by the advance planning of this process with specific objectives and tasks. This alleviated the work of all participants and allowed the conclusion of the work as planned."*

*Antonia Chilikova*

*Tourist information center in Shiroka Laka village*



### 3.2. The planning

The action plan development process began early in September 2003 in all the twelve ecotourism destinations in Bulgaria. It was initiated by workshop in Sofia involving all twelve teams. (*Appendix 2*). The workshop was held early in September for the purpose of agreeing on all activities for the next three months and specifying the manner of interaction during planning process. Representatives of the twelve potential ecotourism destinations presented their materials, arranged meetings and planned publications.

The workshop was followed by an immediate public announcement of the campaign and the beginning of the implementation of the main steps in the process. All actions were aimed at creating dialogue on local-level ecotourism issues, local community involvement and integration of local priorities in the implementation of the plan.

The campaign started with press conferences announcing the objectives and main steps in the Plan development process. The media was the main intermediary providing information and involving all who wished to participate. The media created a favorable information environment promoting ecotourism.

Support by the state institutions was clearly expressed by the participation of regional and/or deputy regional governors in the announcement of the project in many regions. The regional authority of Blagoevgrad was an official partner and co-organizer of the overall process. The regional authorities in Smolyan, Plovdiv, Burgas, Varna, Kardzhali, Stara Zagora, and Gabrovo took active part in the entire process. The regional governors of Pernik and Kyustendil initiated and coordinated the process on their own.

Meetings with key stakeholders, such as the local authorities and branch organizations, were held in every region. Presentation meetings of the national strategy draft were organized with all stakeholders. These meetings achieved their objective of creating the basis for ecotourism discussion in the local community. People were educated about the opportunities for ecotourism development in Bulgaria and were given confidence in the ability of such development to succeed and to be an active part of the process of ecotourism

planning for their regions. A booklet summarizing the Strategy and a Questions and Answers leaflet were used in this first step.

The process of information dissemination and acquaintance with the Strategy was conducted in parallel with the process of reviewing tourism resources. A review was made of documents describing the resources of the region such as: books, reports, statistical documents, strategies, informational studies and others. A large amount of new and up-to-date information was gathered. This review of resources created new partnerships and renewed the cooperation between institutions and organizations in each area.

A summary of results concerning the resources was presented at analysis and review meetings for ecotourism development opportunities which were held in October. Present at these meetings were representatives of municipalities, branch organizations, nature conservation and other citizen organizations, protected areas, governmental institutions, reading libraries, museums and all citizens interested in ecotourism development in the area in which they live. Together, they created and analyzed the image of the destination, considered their advantages and the issues in need of attention in the near future. These analysis meetings served as the starting point for subsequent general meetings aimed at the formulation of ecotourism development priorities in each region. The participants worked under the auspice of importance of this step. Highly committed and attentive, they formulated their views for the future of ecotourism in their municipalities and defined the priorities and activities of importance for its development. Proposals for specific programs and projects were created.

The final stage in creating the action plan included a public presentation of the draft plan and consultation with the stakeholders. The public meetings organized invoked wide interest and allowed for last-minute proposals and changes.

The work teams from each destination presented their draft action plans in a third workshop held in Sofia early November 2003 (*Appendix 3*). They reported on the creation of each of the twelve plans and on the results: the actions envisioned for the following five years.

*"The model of planning with widespread participation yielded very good results. It allowed the unification of differing interests and the building of a common viewpoint about ecotourism development in the region. This result is very significant since it motivates those who took part in the development of the plan to work for its implementation.*

*So far our planning region had involved all municipalities. The drafting of the ecotourism plan caused highly committed participation by the municipalities. The regional administrations gave their full support for ideas surrounding the regional ecotourism action plan, helped in the identification of participants and in the analysis of resource related information.*

*The tourist business representatives realized during the planning stage that such opportunities for meetings and exchange of ideas with other institutions and organizations are very rare. The ecotourism planning allowed such opportunities in the region."*

*Sonia Enilova*

*Chairman of the Board of Managers of the Burgas Regional Tourism Association*

*"Our initial expectations were that the preparation for local elections will prevent the participation of some of the stakeholders. In fact, the municipalities, governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations and all other adherents to the ideal of ecotourism in the region participated very actively irrespective of the pre-election campaigns. We, as a regional tourist organization, find that one of the most important effects of the process was the opportunity to initiate dialogue on ecotourism issues between stakeholders in the south-western region of Bulgaria.*

*The highest activity was during the priority setting meeting. The most active participants were representatives of protected areas: Pirin and Rila national parks, Rila Monastery nature park and the Blagoevgrad RIEW. "*

*Simana Markovska*

*Executive Director of the Pirin Tourist Forum*



## A collage of ten photographs of various scenic spots in Japan, including a purple iris, a cave interior, a stone bridge, a lake with mountains, a waterfall, a canyon, a person on a boat, a person on a bicycle, and a herd of cows.

1.IX.2003 – 30.X.2003

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mca: (30) 6 34 20

### Кампанията по създаването на Регионалния план за екотуризъм



# Екотуризъм в Стара планина ЗАЩО НЕ



## Регионален план за действие – Екотуризъм в Стара планина



За контакти: Регионална туристическа асоциация "Стара плакина" - Габрово, ул. "Р. Каролов" 4  
Тел.: 066/361 90 00 e-mail: rta@stara.bg

# Екотуризъм



През септември 2003г. започна създаването на Регионален планове за действие за туризъм в дванадесет района на страната, които са потенциални туристически дестинации. Предварително се четирите основни стъпки за разработване на планове.

- Заполагане с Проекта за Национална стратегия за екотуризм във всички райони;
- Преглед и оценка на местните ресурси и възможности;
- Определяне на приоритетите и съставяне на регионални планове за действие;
- Обществено представяне на регионалните планове.

Приоритетите за действие, набелязани в еко-туристическите региони ще започнат в петгодишен Национален план за действие. Крайните резултати - усъвършенстваната Стратегия и План за действие ще бъдат обсъдени през март 2004 г. на Втория Национален форум за екотуризъм и ще бъдат внесени за приемане от Националния съвет по туризъм и Правителството.

Всичко, което си интересуваш от развитието на институциите в страната, може да участваш в програмата на създаването на Регионалните Платформи за действие. За Дунавския регион координират организацията в Проектът на МОСВ "Възстановяване на водните зони и подпомагане на земледелието", финансиран от Световната Банка. За повече информации влез в сайта си, прозледат страниците на Дунавския регион, или, ако имате С-мил

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1982 - Болгария  
Полковник. Участник на българските революционни и  
партизански действия. Участник в Април-  
востановието. Участник в антифашистките действия и  
партизанските действия на България.  
1983 - Словения, рп. Партизан 10, стр. 2  
1984 - Словения, рп. Партизан 10, стр. 2  
1985 - Словения, рп. Партизан 10, стр. 2

## ДУНАВСКИ РЕГИОН



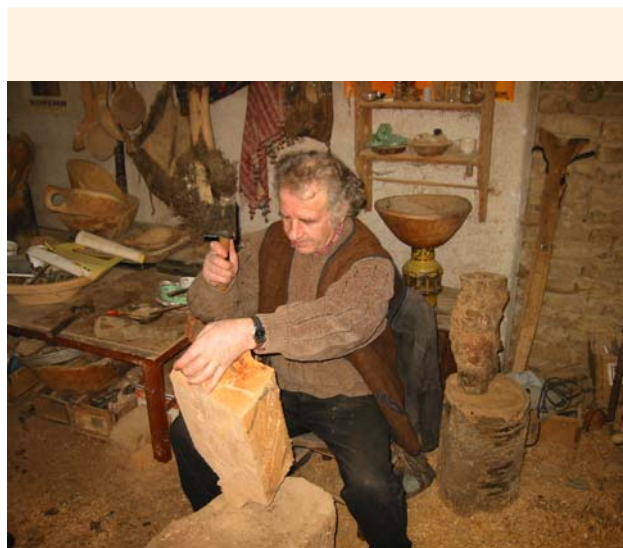


## Part 4: The role of the Foundation for Local Government Reform

The participation of the FLGR in the creation of the action plans was crucial for the involvement of local authorities in the process. The Foundation has been a successful supporter of capacity building with local authorities in Bulgaria through discussion forums, training, creation of information environment and others initiatives. Throughout the years, the Foundation has created a team of experts that has become a successful intermediary concerning dialogue on subjects of importance for local authorities.

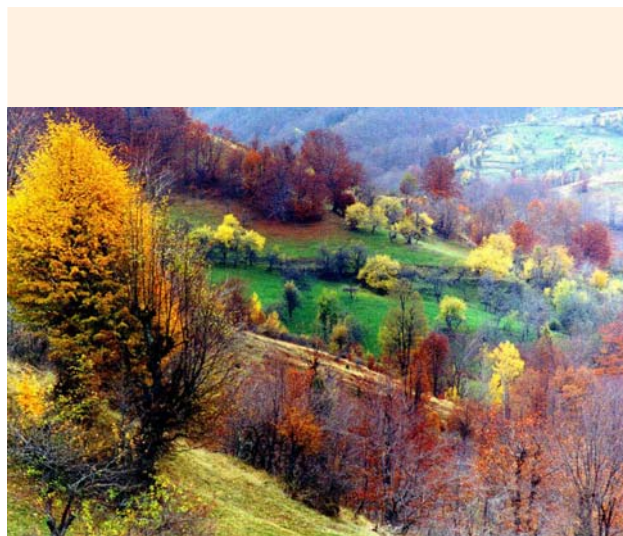
The inclusion of an FLGR team was based on the fact that ecotourism is a form of local-level tourism that can contribute towards local development. The understanding by the local authorities that ecotourism is a priority for their municipalities allowed opportunities to guide local ecotourism development policies and resources. Local authorities and local municipal councils and administrations are increasingly important in the affirmation of government decentralization priorities.

The participation of FLGR experts confirmed the understanding by local authorities of the importance of this process and spurred their involvement in the systematic arrangement of resource information and in the analysis and prioritizing of ecotourism development activities in their regions.



**Craftsman**  
*Jared Hardner*

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**Landscape**  
*Pirin Tourism Forum Archives*

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*"My initial thoughts were that the municipalities would not take an active role in the planning since that time coincided with preparation for local elections. I was surprised by their active involvement. The municipalities mobilized in a very short period of time and presented the resource-related information that we needed in order to begin regional planning"*

*Georgi Pamporov*

*Executive Director of the Rhodopes Regional Tourist Organization*

*"The municipalities were very actively involved in planning ecotourism. Local authorities trust the LGRF, which greatly facilitated interaction between those authorities and our office. The Central Balkan – Kalofer ecotourism society is a relatively young organization and the involvement of LGRF representatives helped in establishing partnerships with local authority representatives."*

*Dimitar Marinov*

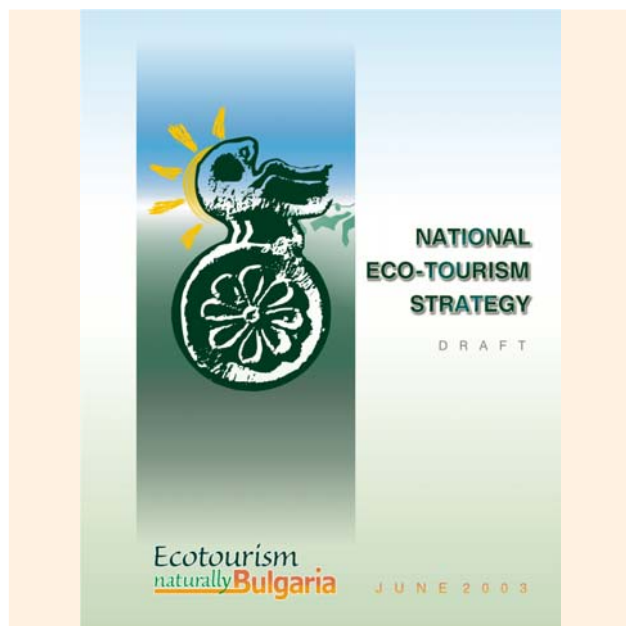
*Executive secretary of the Central Balkan – Kalofer ecotourism society*

*"Sometimes it is difficult to overcome the threshold between expectations and active participation in the realization of an idea. It requires patience and purposeful work. Therefore, the ecotourism plan development process must continue. This plan should be submitted to every municipality and specific activities should be planned at a more detailed level."*

*Yulie Shehova*

*Partners for Local Development Society, Devin*

## Part 5: Publicity in the creation of the plans



### 5.1. Why is publicity important in the planning with stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder participation in the ecotourism planning process can be efficient and based on a system of quality evaluation and decisions only if the parties involved are able to obtain a sufficient amount of reliable information and if the process is transparent.

Publicity in planning ensured the support of many institutions and organizations and created a favorable environment for the process. Many people from local communities understood the objectives of the process and how they could participate in it. Strong relations were created which facilitated achievement of the objectives through the use of all possibilities for participants in the planning process.

Publicity guaranteed the reliability of the process and legitimized it before all stakeholders and the general public. The people believed that participating in the planning made sense.



### 5.2 How was publicity ensured during the creation of the regional ecotourism action plans in the twelve destinations

The action plans were developed with the intent of presenting sufficient amounts of reliable and quality information. This was done by involving all stakeholders in the proposal making process. The process was designed in such a manner to ensure access to information and participation through discussions and proposal creation.

Regional organizations prepared and disseminated special purpose posters informing local communities about the activities of the following two months and possibilities for participation in the ecotourism action planning process. A promotional video clip was used in the Eastern Rhodopes. Many "Summary of the National Strategy" and "Ecotourism Questions and Answers" booklets were distributed allowing people to learn more of the essence and content of the process.

The beginning of the planning campaign was announced to the regional media at press conferences. All coordinating organizations used the media as the primary means of sending messages from the campaign to the broadest range of people in their local communities.

Most coordinating organizations published and distributed their posters for additional exposure for the campaign. A TV clip was created and regularly broadcast on local cable in the Eastern Rhodopes.

Key partners in the process gave interviews to local and regional media on the achievements and issues in the individual steps. Articles dedicated to ecotourism were published in order to provide better information to the public about its essence and possibilities.

One important means of exposure for results

from the working meetings and agreements was the preparation and distribution of summarized minutes of the results of the meetings. All participants declared that this interaction was extremely useful and facilitated the process and the quality of the results because it allowed for completion and further contemplation of the analysis after the meetings.

Public presentation of the plan to interested parties finalized the process of community agreement on ecotourism development priorities and actions in the destination.

*"Ecotourism is good for people and nature. We are proud to have many preserved and diverse ecotourism development resources. I hope that an increasing number of people will understand the benefits of nature conservation. Ecotourism allows for sustainable use of natural resources. The mutual ecotourism planning and publicity of the entire process allowed us to meet representatives of institutions we had not met with before. We established beneficial contacts and exchanged much information. The planning process was enhanced very much by the preliminary dissemination of materials for all meetings. This enabled us to discuss our proposals with more colleagues.*

*Ecotourism development in the region can create opportunities for more responsible interaction with nature. This will facilitate our work as a regional institution concerned with protected areas."*

*Galina Manova*

*Senior expert on protected areas and forests in the Blagoevgrad RIEW*

*"The development of the ecotourism plan is a new experience for us in both approach and content. Many stakeholders took part and many specific proposals were made. The priorities that we chose are realistic.*

*Many people understood the possibilities of protected areas and their use for local people. The planning process expanded our views of the resources in the region."*

*Stefan Kirilov*

*Expert on interpretation and education programs in the Rila National Park Directorate*



## Разработват регионален план за развитие на екотуризма

Мария НЕЙКОВА

Регионален план за развитие на екотуризма ще разработват Бургаска туристическа асоциация и Областна управа- Бургас. Работният проект беше представен вчера от областния управител Иван Витанов и от координатора на проекта Соня Енилова.

Регионални планове за действие ще бъдат създадени в 12 района в страната, които са потенциални

Екипът ще се ангажира с преглед и оценка на местните ресурси и възможности, ще бъдат определени приоритетите и съставен регионален план за действие. Текстовете в нея ще бъдат съгласувани със заинтересованите страни и поставени за обществено обсъждане. Същевременно самите участници ще развият своите виждания за екотуризма като начин за опазване на биологичното разнообразие.

национално ниво ще бъде изяснено както финансирането, така и разработването на екотуристически продукти, маркетинга и ролята на местните власти.

Националната стратегия ще дава отговор на въпроса какво представлява екотуризмът и кое го отличава от другите видове туризъм. Тя ще включва описание на сегашното състояние на наличните ресурси, законова база и същес-

## Ще привлечаме туристи чрез екостратегия

ло се свързва с посещения на вече популярни места с национално значение. Много инициативи в тази посока наистина помагат да се съхрани културното наследство и да се опази биологичното разнообразие на страната ни. Всичко би било добре, ако все по-сино от так е преведено да се разработи отделна стратегия и те трябва да станат основа на националната.

**национална и регионална стратегия,**

която да координира тези инициативи.

Образването на национална стратегия започна със създаването на комплексна оценка на съществуващите обекти, ландшафтно разнообразие, специфичността на местните обичаи, традиции, бит. Разработването на стратегия и на национален план за действие за екотуризъм се спонсорира освен от българското правителство, още и от Американската агенция за международно развитие чрез проекта "Опазване на биологичното разнообразие и икономически растеж". За партньорство е поканен и екипът, работещ по друг проект на екоинициативата "Възстановяване на влажни зони и намаляване на замърсяването".

За целите на начинанието България е разделена на 12 екотуристически региона. За всеки един от тях е предвидено да се разработи отделна стратегия и те трябва да станат основа на националната.

Силистренска област е включена в

**екорегион 12,**

които обхваща територия по цялото поречието на Дунав от западната до източната граница. Точно нашите местни защитени обекти като резерват "Сребърна", влажните зони до Гараз, Малак Пресавец, Калимок-Бръшлен, заедно с тези от другите области по реката, дават възможност да се формират екотуристически пакети, включващи разнообразни маршрути и обекти. Повече от 10 са местата по поречието, където могат да се наблюдават редки птици.



Това райско кътче се намира в центъра на село Ветрен. Нарича се комплекс "Калимврица" - образци за добруджанска предприемчивост и усет към красотата на народната традиция.

националната екостратегия ще се реши на допълнителна среща на 15 и 16 октомври тази година. До края на септември месецът е предвидено за разработването на цялостната екостратегия за регион "Дунавски влажни зони". Очакванията на местните ни специалисти са, че финализирането на тази инициатива, свързана с разработването и на Националния план за действие, ще даде нов и по-голям шанс за цялостно привличане на туристопоток и към Силистренска област.

## РАЗРАБОТВАНЕ НА НАЦИОНАЛНА СТРАТЕГИЯ ЗА ЕКОТУРИЗЪМ

и Национален план за действие за екотуризма в екорегион "Влажни зони по река Дунав" бе в центъра на работна среща, проведена в дните 16 и 17 октомври в Русе, където участие взеха и представителите на община Тутракан - Камелия Златанова - зам.-кмет, д-р Йордан Куцаров - изп. директор на СНЦ "ЗМ "Калимок-Бръшлен", Валентина Христова и Наталия Балканджиева - общински служители.

Целта на срещата, организирана от Звено за

сурси и да се планират приоритетите в развитието на екотуризма в Дунавския регион, като се определят механизмите и подходите за осъществяване то им.

Практиката показва, че за да стане екотуризмът "специалитет" на българския туризъм, е необходимо на национално ниво да се анализират; планират и синхронизират действията и начините за постигане на ефект, т.е. ако се приемат Национална стратегия и Национален план за действие

10.11.-16.11.2003 година  
брой 45

Перспектива

БИЗНЕС ПОЩА  
Делови телефони за платени абонаменти 042/6181, 39333

## Стара Загора в зоната за екотуризъм

С Марина ДИМОВА, експерт във Фондацията за реформа в местното самоуправление, разговаряме за Националната стратегия за екотуризъм и мястото на Стара Загора в нея

- Г-жо Димова, как започва работата по тази стратегия и къде са целите ѝ?  
- По искане на Министерството на околната среда и водите и Министерството на икономиката Американската агенция за международно развитие подготви създаването на Националната стратегия за екотуризъм през периода 2002-2003 г. в София. По-точно, през февруари 2003 г. на национална работна среща беше представен и

**ПРОЕКТ НА ДЕСЕТОДИШНАТА НАЦИОНАЛНА СТРАТЕГИЯ ЗА ЕКОТУРИЗЪМ** създаден с помощта на експерти и всички заинтересовани страни.

- По какви критерии бяха обособени регионите?

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лен план за действие. За вършането на Националната стратегия и създаването на национален план за действие протича паралелно на национално и на регионално ниво. На национално ниво стратегията се усъвършенства от експерти, които работят по теми като финансиране на екотуризма, използване на географски информационни системи, разработване на екотуристически продукти и технич. маркетинг, ролята на местните власти за развитието на екотуризма и развитие на предпринемачеството. Крайните резултати - усъвършенстваната национална стратегия и планът за действие ще бъдат обобщени през януари 2004 г. на Втория национален форум за екотуризъм и ще бъдат внесени за приемане от Националния съвет по туризъм и правителството.

- Как се събраха експертите и бяха ли включени местни кадри, добре запознати с особеностите, проблемите и възможностите на районите?  
- Екипите, които работиха по създаване на регионалните планове за действие, бяха обучени и координирани от Проект "Опазване на биологичното разнообразие и икономически растеж" (ОБРМП II).

**ФИНАНСИРАН ОТ АМЕРИКАНСКАТА АГЕНЦИЯ ЗА МЕЖДУНАРОДНО РАЗВИТИЕ (АМР)**

ОБРМП II подпомага работата на местно ниво с консултантска помощ, с материали за започване на проекта на стратегията и чрез информационни образователни материали. Фондацията за реформа в местното самоуправление взе участие като партньор в процеса, протичащ на регионално и национално ниво, като нашата основна роля бе насърчаване участието на местните власти в разработването на регионалните планове и впоследствие - тяхното интегриране в общинските планове за развитие. Наред с основните експерти на регионално ниво дейността и цялостната координация за интересованите страни се осъществява от местен партньор - Загорският Централен Балканско-местен координатор бе Сдружението за екотуризъм "Централен Балкан-Калопер".

- Защо се счита така, че в първоначалния вариант област Стара Загора излезе от списъка на екорегионите? Беше ли взет предвид фактът, че ако се съкратят разходите от пътя за Стара Загора, ще излезем от екозоната, тогава ще доберем по-сериозни посещения за реализация на екоинициативите, произтичащи в ЕС след време.



Красота в есента Стара Загора

в бъдещност няма сериозно значение замяне? - В резултат на провежданата в Стара Загора първа информационна среща под егидата на областния управител г-жа Мария Неикова, в която участие взеха представители на общините на



## Part 6: The results

### 6.1. The facts

The regional ecotourism action plans were between August and October. This was an extremely intensive process in which all participants invested much time, energy, efforts and expert opinions.

The tourism planning approach with widespread stakeholder involvement and publicity of the results was used for the first time in Bulgaria. The number of participants indicated the interest and readiness for commitment in the determination of important regional issues.

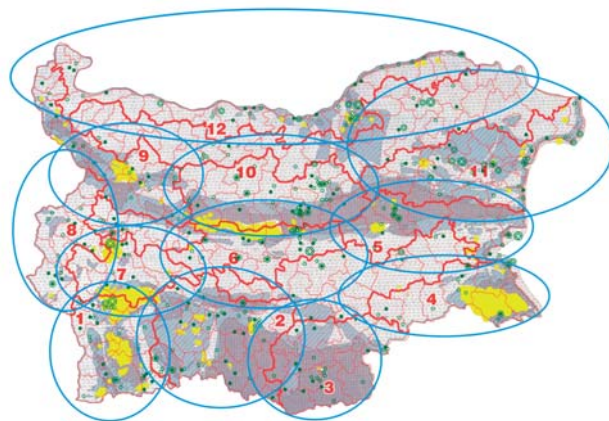
All twelve ecotourism destinations succeeded in developing action plans. The planning campaigns were supported by a large number of donors. Seven regions were assisted by the US Agency for International Development and the remainder by the Swiss government through the Regional Environmental Center.

A total of 120 Bulgarian municipalities took part in the planning process. Despite the pre-election campaign and forthcoming elections in October for mayors and municipal councilors, representatives of the Bulgarian municipalities clearly indicated their interest and support for the plans.

More than 400 individual and group work meetings were organized for the presentation of a national strategy and to plan specific priorities and activities.

More than 1500 Bulgarian citizens participated in the process. They represented many different institutions and organizations such as: representatives of protected areas, nature conservation organizations, other civil organizations interested in ecotourism, tourist societies, museums, reading libraries, trade organizations, tourism councils and information centers.

The planning process included 18 press conferences to announce the individual stages and achievements, and more than 120 publications and television broadcasts in the local and regional media.



### *The twelve Ecotourism Destinations*

### 6.2. Attitude to change

A process causing significant expectations and allowing for changes in ecotourism development was implemented in our country over a relatively short time. Desire of the people to plan activities that better represent their regions as ecotourism destinations caused active participation in all 12 regions. Local people proved a responsible attitude and understanding of the importance of their proposals.

The process mobilized many institutions and individuals. An enormous social energy was accumulated. The planning process created many relationships between participants and established an environment for a continued ecotourism dialogue. Part of this meeting included constructive dialogue between municipalities on the issues of ecotourism and its future. Bulgarian municipalities clearly stated that there are causes worth mutual efforts.

The results raised questions about using this energy in the future and about managing the positive environment achieved in the ecotourism plan creation process in a manner allowing for an attitude of change among the local communities to bring forth such changes: in people, institutions and their communication and interaction, and in the common understanding of ecotourism as an alternative for local people.

*"Many tourism development activities were conducted in the Western Rhodopes. However, this is the first large scale long-term planning initiative. This approach helped us to arrange our ideas, to clarify common viewpoints and to reach a consensus on ecotourism development priorities for the coming five years. This is the first large-scale partnership between non-governmental organizations, representatives of regional government institutions, local authorities and small businesses.*

*All tourism institutions and organizations were very active and interested in the planning process. People believed that ecotourism plan development is worthwhile and that the participation in the gathering, processing and analyzing of information of resources in the Western Rhodopes, participation in discussions and expert groups is worth their time.*

*This high activity in the Western Rhodopes showed that people have realized ecotourism can be a realistic business development alternative. This process also showed that people have realized the need for a strategic approach and mutual planning of initiatives.*

*Ecotourism planning is an opportunity to prove the capabilities of the local people, including specialists and experts on biodiversity, tourism supply and destination development. There is a local initiative in the region looking for a line of development. The ecotourism plan allowed us to put order to our thoughts about the future of the region as a tourist destination."*

*Georgi Pamporov*

*Executive Director of the Rhodopes Regional Tourist Organization*

*"There was much interest in ecotourism planning. Many representatives of municipalities, regional authorities and businesses took part in the discussion of the ideas of the plan. The drawing up of the plan created an environment for ecotourism development in our region.*

*We hope that the clearly formulated needs and activities envisioned by us will attract investment in the region"*

*Hristina Nikolova*

*Regional coordinator of the Danube Wetlands Project, Kalimok-Brushlen Society*

*"The drawing up of the regional ecotourism action plan allowed opportunities for involvement of specialists from the region. The more experts that become involved locally, the more reliable the presentation of protected areas and, of course, better understanding of ecotourism development possibilities.*

*The regional ecotourism plan outlines prospects for potential investors and gives a better idea of the intentions of ecotourism development."*

*Radostin Grudev*

*Senior expert on biodiversity conservation, RIEW Burgas*

*"We gathered much information about the resources in the region. This information will allow us to develop new tourist products and to enrich the ones we currently offer. We need to create products of larger magnitude with more possibilities to attract tourists with different interests.*

*The municipalities will play a very important role. They are the nearest institutional representatives and know the local community and the people. They must support the ecotourism initiatives in all manners, even with resources"*

*Mitko Chochev*

*Tourism Council, village of Mogilitsa*

## Part 7: The future – where to now?

### 7.1. Integration of the ecotourism plan priorities and activities into municipal and district development plans

The action plans in the twelve districts reflect real need for change of environment to ensure ecotourism development of the destinations. The participation of many Bulgarian municipalities and regional authorities was evidence of the interest of local and regional authorities towards ecotourism as a real development opportunity. The discussions made possible by the planning process expressed and identified issues of importance for the areas and priority solutions.

One important step in the next action plan development stage will be to consider the specifics of regional priorities taking into account the needs of each municipality, and to define the forms and activities which should become part of the development plans for individual communities. At this stage, the plans should contain specific practical ideas to create many possibilities for municipal-level interpretation and application. There is a need to develop the understanding of local authorities about their important role and the possibilities that they can provide for development of ecotourism destinations.

The integration of ecotourism action plans into the municipal and regional action plans is one important part of the planned institutionalization and of the assumption of responsibilities related to the functions of local self-government authorities and regional governmental institutions.

### 7.2. Development of local ecotourism management capacities

Ecotourism is an opportunity for a better future of small communities near protected areas. It's conducted locally and products and services are offered by the local populace. This makes management of the destination and of changes related to ecotourism development very important. Other important questions are those concerning the form and means of stakeholder interaction and



**Landscape**  
*Pirin Tourism Forum Archives*

legal possibilities for management of the destinations.

These questions raise the issue of the need to develop local ecotourism management capacity. It is obvious that a significant part of near-future efforts should be directed towards working with organizations and people who have succeeded in mobilizing the community for the creation of action plans. These organizations should have the future objective of creating an environment of people with ecotourism understanding and skills.

### 7.3. National representation mechanism

The results from regional and local processes can be easily lost if no mechanism is in place for national ecotourism representation of all people and institutions participating in the process. Regional and local tourism associations and societies, who acted as local intermediaries, acquired new skills and increased their local-level roles. However, they need assistance through the creation of an adequate institutional environment at the national level to allow continued discussion about ecotourism as a possibility for local people and to present its achievements as numbers and facts.

*"People are convinced that there is a resource that can be developed and contribute to the improvement of economic conditions of the region. There is a need for a support policy by the state and local authorities commensurate with the needs of the region. The local policy should protect the local interests.*

*The state should fulfill adequately and efficiently its' role as a national promoter and advertiser of Bulgaria as a tourism destination. Local communities should be supported in the creation and offering of alternative tourism products since Bulgaria does not currently offer such products.*

*The interaction of the institutions and all stakeholders is important in realizing the priorities of the plan. Looking for common interests is a process that can secure a good basis for dialogue and development of relations.*

*In making this happen, it is very important to ensure real changes in the small business development policy. Still, the national business development strategy does not contain any real incentives proving that small business is a priority.*

*At the same time, business, having reached a certain level, needs to take care of its own development. Our objective is to help the process of understanding for the need of increased skills and capacity.*

*Ecotourism development in Bulgaria requires that entrepreneurs and representatives of regional tourist organizations should be able to observe successful models in countries where ecotourism is already a practice.*

*The people should receive more information about protected areas and about their value. Therefore, a campaign to create positive attitudes towards protected areas would increase the understanding of local communities about the value of surrounding resources and will promote the creation of new tourist products."*

*Silvia Hinkova*

*Executive Director of the Stara Planina Regional Tourist Association*

*"Ecotourism education of the local communities should continue. People should better understand the benefits of resource conservation and should know that they will lose them if they allow exploitation and destruction of said resources.*

*Tourist information centers should develop their role to create an active ecotourism development environment."*

*Antonia Chilikova*

*Tourist information center in Shiroka Luka village*

*"We want to continue to work together and to plan joint activities. Each one of us has a certain capacity to carry out certain projects, but joint work can increase this capacity many times over. Having agreed on the important ecotourism related priorities in the region, we can continue to keep the focus of our work on activities and change the situation in the region that we have formulated in our common view.*

*We are beginning to work for the creation of a sustainable network of partners. The results achieved in the planning process need a form for further development."*

*Simana Markovska*

*Executive Director of the Pirin Tourist Forum*



*"The ecotourism action plan should be integrated into the regional development plan. We need to ensure institutional sustainability for understanding of ecotourism development in the region. An increasing number of people should understand that nature is valuable and ecotourism is an alternative avenue for beneficial and well spent time. People should become more educated on the values of ecotourism."*

*Hristo Abadzhiev*

*Regional Administration for Blagoevgrad, Regional Development Expert*

*"People have hopes and expectations that ecotourism could happen. Communication with central institutions should be improved in order to make these expectations a reality. The regional approach has not been institutionalized as yet and is not part of planning practices in our country. Changes are needed, of the legislation, among others, to allow for a regional approach reflecting real needs.*

*The ecotourism action plan should be integrated into planning the region development plan.*

*One important prerequisite for the successful and efficient implementation of the plan is the creation of a unit for coordination, monitoring and updating of the plan."*

*Sonia Enilova*

*Chairman of the Board of Managers of the Burgas Regional Tourism Association*

*"If we stay in the office, we will not create partnerships. We must be proactive, we must involve and integrate even those who are skeptical at the beginning and do not see the ecotourism development opportunities. We all must be proactive. We must help ourselves to make our lives better. We need support from the state as well. The adoption of the ecotourism strategy and plan as national documents will improve the environment for ecotourism business development.*

*We have tried for the last two years and know that we can implement ecotourism, but ecotourism will be much more successful and of higher quality if the state, municipalities, business and NGOs work together.*

*I believe in the future of ecotourism. I know that it will happen in Bulgaria despite occasional skepticism. The work of our society is an example of ecotourism already happening. We have achieved much over a relatively short time. We are grateful to all people and institutions that supported us. I am convinced that there will be more people supporting and encouraging us than those who are still doubtful.*

*Dimitar Marinov*

*Executive secretary of the Central Balkan – Kalofer ecotourism society*

## **APPENDICES**

**National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan.**

Regional review - Orientation Meeting - July 16-17, 2003

Park Hotel Moskva, Sofia

**Objectives**

1. To establish the team that will finalize the Strategy and the Action Plans for seven ecotourism regions in the country;
2. To orient and train the regional teams for the tasks;
3. To develop the work plan of the process;
4. To identify the mechanisms for collaboration and roles of the parties in this process.

**Participants**

1. Representatives of the seven regional tourism associations – focal points of the regional review (3 people of each) – Pirin Tourism Forum, Rhodopes Regional Tourism Association, Bourgas Regional Tourism Association, Central Balkan – Kalofer Ecotourism Association, Rila Ecotourism Association, Stara Planina Regional Tourism Association, Varna Tourism Chamber;
2. Representatives of donors programs in other regions of the country
3. Representatives of the Foundation for Local Government Reform;
4. Facilitators of the regional efforts – four facilitators;
5. Representatives of the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests;
6. Representatives of the BCEG Project II team.

## Schedule

### **Сряда, 16 юли**

9.00–9.30 Откриване на работната среща. Представяне на целите и задачите, обща информация.

### **Wednesday, July 16**

9.00–9.30 Opening, Objectives, Background

9.30–10.30 Presentation of the participants – by name and organization and expectations – roles in the future process

10.30–11.00 Coffee Break

11.00–12.30 Presentation of the Strategy and the expected results by the end of the project – national and regional levels and the coordination by them Questions and Answers

12.30–14.00 *Lunch*

14.00–15.30 Small groups workshops – four groups – review of current situation

- ☐ Capacity of regional organizations;
- ☐ Potential partners;
- ☐ Existing inventories;
- ☐ Support from the local authorities;
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities in the organization.

15.30–16.00 *Coffee break*

16.00–17.00 Report back

17.00–18.00 Media coverage on regional level – presentation, Q&A, discussions

18.30 *Dinner*

### **Thursday, July 17**

9.00–10.30 Opening of the day and presentation of implementation plan outline Small groups work – implementation plans development

10.30–11.00 Coffee break

11.00–12.30 Presentation of the small groups and finalization of the implementation plan for the whole group. Guidelines for budgeting

12.30–14.00 *Lunch*

14.00–15.00 Needed materials, expertise, coordination with other institutions

15.00–15.30 *Closing session*



# National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan

## Regional review - Orientation Meeting

July 16-17, 2003

Park Hotel Moskva, Sofia

### ***Regional Ecotourism Action Planning***

#### ***A Great Opportunity to Advance Regional Ecotourism Goals***

##### *Background*

At the request of the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the United States Agency for International Development has agreed to support the finalization of the National Eco Tourism Strategy. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the BCEG Project II is to finalize the National Ecotourism Strategy and to develop a five-year National Eco Tourism Action Plan.

In February 2003 at the National Ecotourism Meeting, a working draft of the NETS was presented. With your feedback and the written contributions of participants over a 2-month period, the NETS Draft was finalized in June. The final Draft will be submitted to an official meeting of the National Tourism Council in July.

The goal of the meeting with the National Tourism Council is to form a National Ecotourism Working Group that will coordinate the final development of the NETS. This working group will be supported by the USAID through its BCEG II Project. The Group will also be used to institutionalize the final version of the NETS for approval by the National Tourism Council. This concept was approved during the National Ecotourism Meeting in February, and by the three Ministries that have coordinated efforts on the Strategy to date.

The second objective in meeting with National Tourism Council will be to approve the role of the NEW Group in the development of National Ecotourism Action Plan, at both regional and national levels.

The completion of the Strategy and the develop-

ment of the National Action Plan will be done simultaneously at national and regional levels. At the national level, the Strategy will be improved through a series of topical expert focus groups. Their work will result in filling in of some gaps in the Strategy and developing the Action Plan at the national level.

Simultaneously with the work at the national level, another process will take place that will result in the development of regional action plans.

The results of these two parallel processes will serve to generate the five-year Bulgaria National Ecotourism Action Plan. The work at the national level will be supported by Bulgarian and international consultants.

The final results – improved Strategy and Action Plan – will be discussed in January at the Second National Ecotourism Forum, and will be submitted to the National Tourism Council for approval.

##### *Regional Ecotourism Action Plans*

In order to start ecotourism action planning at regional levels, we organize the first workshop with the participants in this process. Its goal is to develop the timetables and teams that will conduct regional action planning.

USAID funds will be used to support the development of Ecotourism Action Plans in seven eco-regions. The regional tourism associations in these regions are the logical partners in this effort and include:

1. Pirin Tourism Forum
2. Rhodopes Regional Tourism Association
3. Bourgas Regional Tourism Association
4. Central Balkan – Kalofer Ecotourism Association
5. Rila Ecotourism Association
6. Stara Planina Regional Tourism Association
7. Varna Tourism Chamber

Several donor programs that implement projects in different regions of the country are also invited to participate in the process. They undertake to support the Action Plans for these regions, using the methods and materials, provided by the BCEG Project II. These programs are:

1. Danube River Wetlands Project of the World Bank – for the Danube river region;
2. UNDP Rhodopes Project – for the Eastern Rhodopes region;
3. REC Western Stara Planina Project – for the region of the Western Stara Planina;
4. Sofia Regional Environment and Waters Inspectorate – for the western boundary region.

Regional action planning envisions Regional Tourism Associations as major centers for discussion and action planning. We envision that this process will be supported by professional action-planning facilitators and by experts from the Foundation for Local Government Reform.

Regional ecotourism action plans must be completed by the end of October if they are to be successfully compiled into a National Ecotourism Action Plan by the beginning of December 2003. We are therefore expecting action planning to be intensive during the months of September, and October.

Our preliminary approach is to use four main steps in the development of regional action plans:

- ☐ Acquaint each regional audience with the Draft National Ecotourism Strategy;
- ☐ Review and assessment of the existing in the region resources and opportunities;
- ☐ Definition of the priorities and compilation of a regional Action Plan;
- ☐ Public hearing of the regional plans.

Each Regional Tourism Association is expected to participate with at least three participants, who:

- ☐ Will remain engaged in regional ecotourism action planning this autumn;
- ☐ Are natural leaders and trusted in their capacity as dealing fairly and knowledgeable with regional tourism development issues in ecotourism;
- ☐ Are seriously familiar with regional ecotourism needs and resources;
- ☐ Retain good relations with local government and regional tourism business activities, with a particular focus on ecotourism.

### Methods of Work

The process that starts now is expected to be extremely intensive. The final product of this process for each region is an Ecotourism Action Plan for the respective region.

This final product will be elaborated as a result of the steps listed above. We shall apply the following working methods:

- ☐ Review and analysis of documents;
- ☐ Meetings and conversations with interested parties;
- ☐ Workshops with interested parties;
- ☐ Informing the public through the local and regional mass media;
- ☐ Public presentations.

It is important to realize that the Plans developed as a result of this process have no administrative affiliation. They are not plans for a given region or municipality. This is true, but it is also true that their actual owner are the associations, and it is upon them that these plans rely to be “brought to life” in the local and regional development strategies and plans.

### Program Coordination

The work is coordinated between the four major participants in the process:

- ☐ BCEG Project II – coordinator of the entire program at regional and national levels;
- ☐ Regional Tourism Associations – the actual implementers of the program – central to the development of the regional Action Plans and their “owners”. It is expected that in the future these associations will be the ones to ensure the implementation of the Action Plans at local and regional levels;
- ☐ Consultants – process facilitators. They work permanently with their regional associations, and report to the BCEG Project II both for the process, and for the final product;
- ☐ Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR). The Foundation has two main roles in this process: 1) Foundation representatives will work in parallel with the facilitators to assist the involvement of the local authorities in the process, especially in view of the pre-election period, in which the process will take place; 2)

the Foundation will administer the budgets of the seven regional associations, which will be allocated for the development of the regional Action Plans.

For the needs of the ongoing work coordination the usual communication means will be used – telephone, e-mail, fax. Three general meetings of all participants will be held:

- ☐ To form the regional and national teams – July, 2003
- ☐ To initiate the process at the regional level – September, 2003
- ☐ To present the regional plans – November 2003

The facilitators and representatives of the FLGR will meet in Sofia more often to exchange information and to coordinate their efforts.

We also expect that all regional associations will participate in the Second National Ecotourism Forum in January, 2004.



# **National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan**

## **Regional review - Orientation Meeting**

July 16-17, 2003

Park Hotel Moskva, Sofia

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

#### Pirin Tourism Forum

1. Simana Markovska, Executive Director
2. Georgi Georgiev, Exper, Project Coordinator
3. Ognian Lazarov, Local Coordinator, Gotse Delchev Municipality

#### Rhodopes Regional Tourism Association

4. Dina Vulcheva, Chairman of the Chepelare Tourism Council, Head of Tourism Department at the Municipal Administration
5. Atanas Sgurov, Biologist, Chairman of Unique Rhodopes Association
6. Georgi Pamporov, Hotel-keeper, Executive Director of the Rhodopes RTA

#### Burgas Regional Tourism Association

7. Maria Patronova, Strandja Nature Park
8. Dimitrina Karaiotova
9. Vesselin Kehaiov

#### Central Balkan – Kalofer Ecotourism Association

10. Dimitar Marinov, Executive Secretary
11. Dobrinka Tsutsova, member – hotel-keeper
12. Lalyu Ganchev, member – private entrepreneur (Internet services)

#### Rila Ecotourism Association

13. Nikolay Djambazki, Executive Director
14. Vladimir Chapkanski, Managing Board member
15. Ivan Konyarski, member – private entrepreneur

#### Stara Planina Regional Tourism Association

16. Ivo Georgiev, Assistant
17. Milko Iliev, Secretary of the Drianovo Tourism Council, member of Stara Planina RTA

#### Varna Tourism Chamber

18. Georgi Shipkovenski, Chief Secretary
19. Stoyan Marinov, Executive Director of Tourexpo
20. Yulian Bonev

*Rhodopes Project, UNDP*

- 21. Karsten Germer, Project Leader
- 22. Ogniana Glavussanova
- 23. Shenay Redjeb, Regional Economic Development and Investment Agency, Kardjali

*Western Stara Planina Project*

- 24. Neli Papazova, REC, Western Stara Planina Project Coordinator
- 25. Detelina Petrova, North-Western Balkan Regional Tourism Development Association, Project Coordinator

*Wetlands Project*

- 26. Marieta Stoimenova, Project Leader
- 27. Hristina Nikolova, Tutrakan Project Coordinator
- 28. Natalia Balkandjieva, Tutrakan Tourist Information Center
- 29. Ani Peizanova, Persina Nature Park
- 30. Stoyan Michov, Belene Project Coordinator

*Sofia Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Waters*

- 31. Ina Inkyova, Biodiversity Expert
- 32. Stella Todorova, Expert

*Ministries*

- 33. Mihail Mihailov, Head of Protected Areas Dept, National Nature Protection Service, Ministry of Environment and Waters
- 34. Raina Hardalova, Expert, National Nature Protection Service, Ministry of Environment and Waters
- 35. Dessislava Mihalkova, Expert, Ministry of Economy
- 36. Anna Petrakieva, Expert, National Forestry Board, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

*Foundation for Local Government Reform*

- 37. Andrey Goranov
- 38. Marina Dimova
- 39. Zdravko Sechkov
- 40. Nikoleta Efremova

*USAID/BCEG Project II*

- 41. Ivanina Beleva, Program Coordinator, USAID
- 42. Steven Dennison, BCEG Project II Team Leader
- 43. Kamelia Georgieva, BCEG Project II Ecotourism Program Coordinator
- 44. Svetlana Aladjecm, BCEG Project II Communications Specialist
- 45. Nelly Georgieva, Facilitator
- 46. Iren Stefanova, Facilitator
- 47. Metodi Metodiev, Facilitator
- 48. Ventseslav Panchev, Facilitator
- 49. Vessela Gavrailova, Ecotourism Program Assistant
- 50. Krassimir Kostov, Logistics Specialist
- 51. Rennie Barret, Interpreter

## National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan

Orientation Meeting

September 4, 2003

*Park Hotel Moskva, Sofia*

### Objectives

1. To coordinate the efforts of the entire team towards the starting campaign for the Regional Ecotourism Action Plans;
2. To coordinate the efforts for the media coverage at the regional and national level;
3. To coordinate the organizational and financial aspects of the campaign.

### Participants

1. Representatives of the seven regional tourism associations – focal points of the regional review (2 people of each) – Pirin Tourism Forum, Rhodopes Regional Tourism Association, Bourgas Regional Tourism Association, Central Balkan – Kalofer Ecotourism Association, Rila Ecotourism Association, Stara Planina Regional Tourism Association, Varna Tourism Chamber;
2. Representatives of the Foundation for Local Government Reform;
3. Facilitators of the regional efforts – four facilitators;
4. Representatives of the BCEG Project II team.

### Schedule

9.00–9.30	Opening of the Working Meeting. Presenting the goals and objectives, general information
9.30–10.30	Presentation for each of the regions – what has been accomplished so far. Achievements and new ideas. Problems. Problem resolution
10.30–11.00	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11.00–12.30	Presentation for each of the regions – what has been accomplished so far. Achievements and new ideas. Problems. Problem resolution. Coordination between the regions and FLGR and BCEG Project II
12.30–14.00	<i>Lunch</i>
14.00–15.00	<i>Work with the media. Presenting the media action plans. Coordination at the national and regional levels</i>
15.00 – 16.30	Next steps. Organizational issues. Budgets. Reports. Closing

## Ecotourism Action Plans

Working Meeting

November 4, 2003

*Park hotel Moskva, Sofia*

### Agenda

**4 Nov 2003**

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 8.30–9.00   | Registration  |
| 9.00–9.30   | Presentation of the tasks and objectives, presentation of the participants  |
| 9.30–10.30  | Presentation of three regional plans.<br><i>Strandja and Southern Black Sea and Eastern Balkans</i><br><i>Central Balkan – North</i><br><i>Eastern Rhodopes</i><br>Questions and answers.   |
| 10.30–11.00 | <i>Coffee break</i>   |
| 11.00–11.30 | Official opening of the working meeting   |
| 11.30–12.30 | Presentation of three regional plans.<br><i>Western Rhodopes</i><br><i>Danube River Wetlands</i><br><i>Central Balkan - North</i><br>Questions and answers.   |
| 12.30–14.00 | <i>Lunch</i>  |
| 14.00–15.30 | Presentation of five regional plans.<br><i>South – West</i><br><i>Vitosha and Northern Rila</i><br><i>Northern Black Sea and Dobrudja</i><br><i>Western Border</i><br><i>Vrachanski Balkan and Western Balkans</i><br>Questions and answers. Presentation of the Foundation for Local Governmental Reform. Questions and Answers. |
| 15.30–16.00 | <i>Coffee break</i>   |
| 16.00–17.00 | Summary of the presented plans. John Todd. Discussion.  |
| 17.00–17.30 | Closing. Next steps.  |



# **Ecotourism Action Plans**

## **Working Meeting**

November 4, 2003

***Park hotel Moskva, Sofia***

Within the period August – November 2003 the Ecotourism Action Plans for twelve potential ecotourism destinations were developed.

The work on the development of the Action Plans was coordinated by the following organizations or programs:

1. Pirin Tourism Forum;
2. Rhodopes Regional Tourism Association;
3. Bourgas Regional Tourism Association;
4. Central Balkan – Kalofer Regional Ecotourism Association;
5. Rila Regional Ecotourism Association;
6. Stara Planina Regional Tourism Association;
7. Varna Tourism Chamber.
8. The World Bank Danube River Wetlands Project – for the Danube River Region;
9. The UNDP Rhodopes Project – for the Eastern Rhodopes Region;
10. REC Western Stara Planina Project – for the Western Stara Planina Region;
11. Pernik and Kiustendil Regional Administrations – for the Western Border region.

Those were supported by professional facilitators and by experts from the Foundation for Local Governmental Reform (FLGR).

The Regional Ecotourism Action Plans cover twelve potential ecotourism destinations in the country and are not related with the administrative regions or the plan regions of the country. They are identified following the landscape approach.

The proposals made by the regions for including priority actions are going to be incorporated into the National Ecotourism Action Plan.

The development of the regional plans comprised of four main steps:

- ☐ Acquaintance with the Draft National Ecotourism Strategy at regional level;
- ☐ Review and evaluation of the local resources and opportunities;
- ☐ Identification of priorities, and drafting the regional action plans;
- ☐ Public presentation of the regional plans.

## **Statistics**

- ❑ In the process participated 140 municipalities
- ❑ Individuals meetings or meetings in small groups for the preparation of the planning process – over 400
- ❑ Participants in the process in the whole country – over 1500 of over 800 different institutions and organizations
- ❑ 18 Press Conferences
- ❑ Over 120 registered publications and emissions in the local and regional media
- ❑ Support by other donors – United Nations Development Program, Regional Ecological Center (the Government of Switzerland via the Stability Pact), World Bank – over 12 000 USD.

# Ecotourism Action Plans

## Working Meeting

November 4, 2003, Park hotel Moskva, Sofia

## List of participants

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